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ABSTRACT

Information presented in this paper was used as a rationale for implementing a developmentally appropriate primary education program in the Redwood City School District, Redwood City, California. The purpose of the paper was to emphasize the need for intensifying the entry level program for students in order to insure a successful school experience for all. Discussion focuses on attitudes in people which engender success in school, societal changes which influence education, and the traditional characteristics of learning in the American classroom. Problematic characteristics of the District which were considered important to take into account in developing a new educational model are specified along with the hypotheses that constituted the foundation for beginning a relevant school readiness program for very young children. The envisioned program was designed to utilize the District's Child Development Center to promote children's readiness for formal learning. The concluding section of the paper provides an outline of the program and a timeline for its implementation. (RH)

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REDWOOD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Redwood City, California
September 23, 1988

ED299021

JUSTIFICATION PAPER FOR INTENSIFIED PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY GRADE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Kenneth G. Hill Ed.D, Superintendent

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Note: This paper was used as justification for instituting a developmentally appropriate primary education program in the Redwood City School District. It was a discussion piece for beginning a change process. The timeline in the paper did not develop as projected. In fact, it was accelerated tremendously. Since the Board took action on the general concept and proposal, the District has done the following:

Refurbished and modified a vacant facility into a modern complex housing students from ages three through seventh.

Hired a Director of Primary Education who is responsible for developing a model primary education center and training the primary staff in age appropriate classroom strategies.

Reduced class size in Kindergarten and First Grade from 28:1 to 24:1 with plans to reduce that ratio to 23:1 next year.

Instituted the High Scope Curriculum in pre-school and Kindergarten and is working on a curriculum for first and second grades.

Is disseminating information and training to other kindergarten teacher in the district.

PS 017527

When reading the paper, think of it as a beginning point with a myriad of course corrections and redefinition occurring as the district actually began the process of change.

REDWOOD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Redwood City, California

JUSTIFICATION PAPER FOR INTENSIFIED PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY GRADE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The purpose of this paper is to reinforce the need for intensifying the entry level program for students in order to insure a successful school experience for everyone. It approaches the problem by looking at Child Development Services,--not as a problem area, but instead as an opportunity, which if used to advantage can assist the District in providing a relevant education system for a diverse student population. The Redwood City School District has been concentrating on the implementation of programs which are responsive to its changing student population. It has been promoting its mission of establishing a system which emphasizes the total development of all children it serves. The School District has been reviewing the Children's Center Program, studying approaches to prevent dropouts, instituting programs with pro-social orientations, and encouraging innovations based on the most current theories of learning. In relationship to these areas of emphasis, some concomitant factors must be considered in modifying educational goals in our community. These concomitant factors focus on attitudes in people which engender success, societal changes which influence education and the traditional characteristics of learning in the American classroom. A discussion of these factors form the foundation of this paper with the latter portion of the theme devoted to developing an idea which responds to the "new learner" in a changing world.

The first factor regarding the relationship of attitudes to success postulates that learning is an attitudinal process which may be affected slightly by longer days, longer school years, and more intensive work in the basic subject areas. But these reforms are superficial at best and are not significant when viewing the increasing complexities of schooling in our society. Studies have shown that people who are optimistic about the future, think in terms of where they will be in five years, and have some understanding of current events and their relationship to the future, are more successful than those concerned only with what is happening at the moment. In the classroom, students who internalize a future orientation will be more successful and feel the gratification of learning. This classroom spirit emphasizes hope and optimism in students and provides them with an understanding of how they fit into the future scheme of things. A basic element of reform should focus on developing these positive attitudes in children during the early years of school.

The second factor which has a significant implication for education are the societal factors which affect the child's ability to succeed in school. The statistics of our time underscore the importance of the school in creating a climate for children which insures academic success. In the past, the family and church took the dominant role in socializing the young. During the last twenty years the family and church have become less effective in this process and the schools have become more essential in filling that

gap. Dr. Victor Fuchs, a health researcher from Stanford, cites some basic statistics describing current society. These demographic facts provide a flavor of the changing melieu in which education is operating. He states that for the first time in America the majority of adults do not live in households where there are children. Fifty-seven percent of adults live in households which do not have children under eighteen years of age. The number of children born to unmarried women have increased significantly and about thirty-three percent of women between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-four are not married. At the present time American women in the childbearing age groups are not producing enough children to replace the present population. It would require 2.1 children per woman to maintain the present U.S. population and the birthrate is 1.8 children per white woman. Hispanic women in America, however, are averaging three children, while American-Asians produce about 1.6 children per women in the childbearing years. These factors alone indicate that the make-up of our society is changing dramatically. These statistics describe basic elements of America's population changes and exclude complicated social problems such as substance abuse, crime rates, child abuse, the rising number of latchkey children and other issues which are of immediate and far reaching concern. These facts tell us that the racial and ethnic composition of our society is changing with American Hispanic women comprising the only group which has a birthrate consistent with what is required to replace the declining population; that fewer families are concerned with rearing the young because they are in families without

children; and that single parent families are prevalent. The Redwood City School District serves a community which has all the societal elements described in these few statistics.

The third factor which must be explored in developing a responsive educational program is the traditional American classroom learning model. Education in America is a vehicle through which people maintain a consistent culture. It is a middle class institution taught by surrogates of the middle class society. The children who are not descendents of the middle class culture will have difficulty unless educational practitioners possess the understanding, skills and cultural awareness to provide the best possible educational climate for all the children received by the District. This array of skills focuses on one preliminary and supreme aim--to make sure that every child introduced to formal education is ready for the task at hand.

In the past, preparing young children for a formal educational system was generally done by middle class American parents who were products of the public school system. They understood the goals and the cultural mores which drove the curriculum. They provided the pre-school experiences to their children which were consistent with the system and enhanced the chances of their children in successfully competing in the American classroom. Readiness for school or learning then becomes even more of a priority in students and parents who are not readily conversant with the expectations of the system. These children may be the

product of a different culture, children from poor families or children from non-traditional families operating under circumstances which are different from the traditional norms in our society. The issue of preparation of students for formal education has specific implications for the Redwood City School District. Most of the students entering the schools of the District do not have the cultural and socio-economic background for succeeding in the American School System. It is encumbent on the District to maintain the basic system which has supported America's growth, and also prepare those who are unfamiliar with the system to gain those experiences required to succeed.

Finally, the characteristics of our District which present the greatest challenges and must be considered in developing a new educational model are:

A rising number of immigrants from Spanish speaking countries.

A growing number of children from low income families.

A growing number of middle class and upper middle class residents who are confused by the District's changing demographics and wish to have their children in schools with less cultural and socio-economic diversity

A growing number of children from non-traditional family settings.

Heterogeneity and its relationship to schools is extremely apparent in Redwood City. The process of education in this District revolves around a plethora of techniques necessary for teaching students in a diverse school population. The techniques include multi-methodological approaches, developmentally oriented English language acquisition programs, English as a second language curricula based on life experiences, advisement programs, peer counseling, continua development, experimentation in peer coaching, systematic staff evaluation programs, a whole language program, continual staff development, cooperative learning, technological education, global education, etc. The teaching strategies inherent in these techniques are not new and different. They are the strategies appropriate for a system which represents all students from a wide variety of cultural, socio-economic, and language backgrounds. What is needed now is programatic modifications which continues the best of all we are doing and focuses on total success for students in the early years. The action research and program development done in the District is based on the premise that participative approaches and prudent risk taking, with involvement of informed people in decision making, can produce a system responsive to the particular attributes of the children served by this District. The District's Principles of Governance accentuates that collaborative climate.

More families where both parents are working or where there are single parents.

A greater need for programs designed to handle the results of complex social factors which have affected the mental and educational development of children.

AN IDEA WHICH RESPONDS TO THE NEEDS OF THE "NEW LEARNER" IN A CHANGING WORLD

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework established in the preceeding paragraphs, the District has been grappling with its role in educating the school aged child while recognizing that every child younger than five years of age needs preparation for the challenges of the formal classroom. The role of the school in preparing children for entry into the system has become more necessary in recent years because the student population in the District is more heterogeneous and immigration has increased. Seymour B. Sarason of Yale University sums up this American educational dilemma in the publication, Excellence in Our Schools--Who Will Make It Happen which is a compendium of articles published by the College Board. Dr Sarason states:

> For decades, neither educators, nor policy makers, nor the larger society were hospitable to the idea that the public schools had an obligation to children with unique educational needs. Their conception of the goals of education and of who should be in our public schools left little room for those children discernibly different from the mythical "model student." Ironically, even before those children became part of the school scene, that conception was unrealistic in regard to the heterogeneity of the school population. The important point here is that recommendations for improving our schools that do not take into account the heterogeneous character of the school population and its consequences for the culture of the school will fail in their purposes.

DISTRICT DIRECTION

The school district is making good progress toward its established goal. The grand design has been steady and doggedly pursued in making education relevant in Redwood City. The recognition that change is occurring as rapidly as it can is often perceived only by those who are in the "planning seat". The fifty-seven percent of parents without children under eighteen years of age may think that things are pretty much as they used to be. Parents in the homogeneous parts of the community who don't see the changing national demography as clearly as others may feel that things are pretty much the same. The Superintendent of Public Instruction who must create credibility in education also may be embued with a high time presence (the here and the now) because of the necessity for reacting to a crisis and the need to respond to it quickly and effectively. We are now at a stage for reviewing all of this in light of what we know and what is practical. This paper has established some hypotheses based on research and general knowledge. These hypotheses are presented as follows:

> Education in America is a middle class phenomenon and the techniques for delivering instruction are primarly geared for those born and reared in America.
>
> Immigration and changing characteristics of the population require a restructuring of schooling in America.

Concepts taught in schools must not only focus on the academics, but also on a socialization process, which accentuates an optimistic view and future orientation in students.

It is not practical to concentrate on improving education through curriculum standards which are not associated with sweeping and dramatic changes in how subject matter is delivered in the classroom.

These hypotheses, if acceptable, are the foundation for beginning a relevant school readiness program for very young children. The approach is to develop a concerted program of readiness for formalized learning for children in the Child Development Center and those who are in the early years of formal schooling. It requires a different mind set for those who may believe that nothing has changed in the district during the past thirty years. It encourages us to follow a pattern of innovation in educating young children from diverse backgrounds. It begins an innovative thought process which will have long lasting effects if the concept is developed and institutionalized. It requires an examination of why we are doing some of the things we do in dealing with a changing client system.

OUTLINE AND TIMELINE FOR A SUGGESTED PROGRAM

The first concept presented to the Board on October 8, 1986, integrates pre-school education, early childhood education, parent education and drop-out prevention strategies in one focused approach--getting students off to a right start in

school. It establishes a high powered position of Director of Primary Education and Child Development Services employed under the auspices of the K-8 program with some funding from the Child Development Program. The person in this position would train and develop pre-school and primary staffs in readiness techniques which provide the best opportunity for all children to succeed and stay in school. The approach maintains the present Child Development Center Program with a new design for improving primary education in the District.

An elaboration of the approach suggested to the Board is presented below. The program and its implementation timeline is somewhat general because the details will develop as the Board Sub-Committee works with the staff.

EXCERPTS FROM PRIMARY GRADE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN APPROVED BY THE BOARD IN FALL 1986

The primary grade restructuring process consists of three stages implemented over a period of two and one-half years. The tentative activities for developing the program are outlined below:

Stage I Startup Spring 1987

A sub-committee of the two Board members and a District Office administrator would begin meeting with the Dropout Prevention staff, CDC staff and some primary education oriented personnel. The basic charges of the Sub-Committee are as follows:

1. Explore the interrelationship of the CDC with dropout prevention, parenting and primary education programs.
   a. Study elements of each program
   b. Adopt a Philosophical Framework (may be same as Dropout Prevention)
   c. Study anticipated program change
   d. Decide on the efficacy of proceeding further by at least April 1, 1987

2. Set up the logistical arrangement in reorganizing the school entry program for Redwood City School.
   a. Establish budgetary framework and staff allocation procedures for CDC

b. Develop Job Description for Director

c. Develop selection procedures for Director of Primary Education and Child Development Services

d. Work out salary considerations with MPRC

3. Select the Director with the contract beginning on July 1, 1987.

4. Work through Problem Statement: How can pre-school and early primary grade programs best assure successful and effective school experiences for all children?

Stage II 1987-88

1. Employ a new Director and introduce him/her to all aspects of the position.

2. Decide on State waivers required to increase local program efficiencies.

3. Begin an assertive program of advocacy in Sacramento re: Child Development Centers and Primary Education.

4. Establish an action plan for instituting an integrated pre-school and primary education program which is consistent with School District Philosophical Framework in Dropout Prevention.

5. Work with CDC staff to revamp procedures and funding so that CDC can operate within funds available.

6. Complete meeting with negotiating teams of RCTA and CSEA to discuss bargaining realignment.

7. Complete a report to the Board about first year's progress and recommend whether or not the District should continue efforts in retaining the CDC.

Stage III 1988-89 (if appropriate)

1. Institute Staff Development Program in pre-school and primary theories and practices which are appropriate for Redwood City School District student population.

2. Develop scope and sequence of child development activities which promote readiness for learning and entry into school.

3. Have CDC on self-sustaining basis with a five-year operational plan.

4. Coordinate all the services of the community, District, Business and other agencies in developing a readiness and an ongoing support system for parents and young children.

5. Coordinate the implementation of a broad based program which implements the Action Plan established by the Board and its Sub-Committee.

6. If necessary and/or appropriate, make final assessment about maintaining CDC in the District.

SUMMARY

Research is clear about several givens in the educational process. Children succeed if they are confident in their surroundings, have peer acceptance, have teacher acceptance, are valued in the work place (school), meet successes in school and are treated with respect by most adults they meet. Well ordered climates and high expectations are woven into those six affective strands of the fabric which make successful school experiences for students. Though important, those two qualities are not the prime factors for school successes in the early years. Without the climate of trust, respect and experiential training, students do not have the ground work for effective schooling. Schools which accommodate the learning styles of students from a wide spectrum of socio-economic levels and cultural backgrounds in a comfortable setting will best serve the future of our country.

Elliot Eisner states that it is necessary for educators to help every child develop a love affair with the school. The statement seems somewhat trite, but it obviously has a deeper meaning. The best person on the job is one who enjoys the work. The best student is one who enjoys school. The root of the suggested program would place substantial emphasis on primary education and child development approaches which broaden conventional educational services, so that they are effective not only for those from the classic American background, but to all others. This program would emphasize even more the educational and behaviorial strategies which will ready young children for a formal

school setting and establish in them positive attitudes about education.

At the present time the Redwood City School District has a socio-economic and ethnic mix which will exist in California in 1990. It is appropriate that we begin a long range program which looks at the future of education in the State and addresses the needs of the "New Learner" in the process so that society will receive the best from everybody living here. As Sarason points out, "recommendations for improving our schools which do not take into account the heterogeneous character of the school population and its consequences for the culture of the school will fail in their purposes."

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